

ABC NIGHTLINE
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KOPPEL: Joining us now live in our Boston bureau, Dr. John Silber, president of Boston University, a member of the bipartisan commission on Central America, headed by Henry Kissinger and appointed by President Reagan, and in our Washington bureau, Raymond Bonner, former New York Times correspondent in Central America and a frequent critic of U.S. policy in the region.

INTERVIEWED

KOPPEL: They're, they're talking about a feared invasion. You speak of it as though it already has taken place. BONNER: I mean, I think the focus is, shouldn't be on whether there's gonna be an invasion. The fact is the United States is currently at war against Nicaragua. You know, usually our wars are carried out by the Pentagon and the Defense Department, but this one's being run

by the CIA. I mean, we've seen the mining of the harbors. We've seen the CIA manual. The United States has trained, equipped and is paying 15,000 guerrillas

fighting against Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinista government. I think we have to put that in some kind of a perspective, Ted, to understand the fear in Nicaragua. That would be the equivalent of 1.2 million Soviet-equipped, Soviet-trained and Soviet-paid guerrillas attacking the United States from Soviet-built bases in Canada. And that is, that is the perspective in which, ah, the Nicaraguans see it.

KOPPEL: All right. Dr. Silber, I kind of suspect that you view, first of all, that, that piece of video that we just saw and, secondly, what Mr. Bonner said from a slightly different vantage point. Want to take a crack at it? SILBER: Yes, I think the exploitation of children, ah, is, ah, is clear from that. That's a characteristic of totalitarian nations. Mr. D'Escoto's plaintive plea

about why does the United States want to invade a smaller country misses the

point entirely. Why is Mr. D'Escoto willing to lend himself as an agent to Cuba

and the Soviet Union to impose a dictatorship on Nicaragua? The Nicaraguans fought bravely and effectively to liberate their country from the dictatorship of Somoza, and the United States made that possible because President Carter withdrew all financial and military support from Somoza. After they had their victory, the Nicaraguans were then subjected to a new revolution which, which terminated the influence of democrats in their government and imposed a Marxist dictatorship on that country.

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KOPPEL: Let me just slip in for a moment here, because I, I'm not sure if this isn't just a little bit of revisionist history when you say that President Carter made their revolution possible. That's really not the way it happened, is it? SILBER: Well, I think it is the way it happened. I think most observers agree that there was never a time when the national guard was defeated in the field. The national guard was demoralized when suddenly it found that the United States support had disappeared. If the United States had continued to support Somoza, his overthrow would have been impossible.

KOPPEL: Now what about the other, ah, the other charge that Mr. Bonner just made, ah, namely this drawing a parallel or at least an equivalency between the number of contras that are being supported by the CIA in their war against Nicaragua and the equivalent of, let's say, having 1.2 million Soviet-sponsored, ah, terrorists fighting against the United States? SILBER: Well, he uses those funny numbers just by making population extrapolations from one place to the other. The important thing to remember is that 15,000 Nicaraguans, not members of the CIA, 15,000 Nicaraguans are now trying to liberate their country from the Cuban dictatorship, and these are led not by the United States or by the CIA, but by famous Nicaraguan names such as Eden Pastora, Colero, Robelo, Chomorro, the very people who were instrumental in defeating Somoza. It is outrageous to treat those people as if they were flunkies of the United States. Arturo Cruz is going up and down this country, talking about the way in which he was denied the opportunity to participate in the election in Nicaragua. Here we have a country that is so afraid, a government that is so afraid of the lack of confidence the people have in it that it will not allow a free election. We have a, a totalitarian country in which they could not get more than about 65 percent of their registered voters to vote and in which the communist regime could not win even a simple majority!

EXCERPTED